



## Testimony of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Connecticut

By Thomas Burr

Human Services Committee

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Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, and members of the Human Services Committee; my name is Thomas Burr, and I am the Public Policy and Affiliates Relations Manager of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Connecticut). I am testifying today **in support of S.B. 82 and H.B. 5321.**

NAMI is dedicated to building better lives for those with lived experience with mental health conditions, and their families. NAMI Connecticut and its nine local affiliates provide support groups and educational programs for people with mental health conditions and their loved ones and advocates for policies to improve the lives of people affected by mental health conditions.

NAMI's national public policy is focused in 3 main areas, one of which is to improve care. As a national organization, NAMI fights for policies to ensure people get the best possible care. This includes expanding access to health insurance, requiring parity coverage of mental health care, and ensuring that the right services are available at the right time.

Another focus of NAMI's public policy advocacy is to intervene early, where we fight for policies to ensure people get help early. This includes better research to detect and identify mental illness, integration of mental health care into primary care settings, and access to mental health in schools.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> focus is to divert people involvement in the criminal justice system. NAMI fights for policies to get people help, not handcuffs. This includes expanding access to crisis services, promoting best practices in de-escalation, and diversion of people experiencing psychiatric crises to treatment.

### **Regarding S.B. 82: AN ACT ELIMINATING INCOME AND ASSET LIMITS FOR THE MED-CONNECT HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM FOR WORKING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.**

This bill's stated purpose is to expand Medicaid coverage for working persons with disabilities.



As the country's largest grassroots mental health organization, we know that people with mental health conditions are always in a better place when they can work and contribute to society. However, oftentimes disabled people may be afraid to work as they fear they may lose benefits, especially health insurance. Eliminating the income and asset limits on the MED-Connect Program will go a long way to removing this barrier. These limits also can prevent many from saving up for emergencies and add an additional barrier for many who need the program. And of course, people who work will also pay taxes, so this is truly good public policy, and a win-win for both the disabled individuals, and the Connecticut Taxpayer.

**Therefore, we support S.B. 82.**

**Regarding H.B. 5321: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A STATE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE COVERAGE.**

The purpose of this bill is to expand access to behavioral health care by establishing a state ombudsman's office to reduce private and public insurance reimbursement barriers for small and group health care providers.

We feel very strongly that not only does the public have a vested interest in the creation of a Ombudsman's Office for Behavioral Healthcare; but so too does the State of Connecticut, inasmuch as when people cannot obtain equivalent healthcare services as outlined in both the State and Federal Mental Health Parity laws, often they will ditch their private healthcare insurance and enroll in the State's Medicaid program, to ensure they obtain those needed services. This results in an expensive and, in my humble opinion, egregious cost shift from private health insurance companies to the State of Connecticut Taxpayer, and should not be tolerated!

**Therefore, we support H.B. 5321.**

**Thank you for your time and attention.**

Respectfully,

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